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MILITARY LABOR UNITS IN POLAND

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By Warsaw correspondent  
of ACI [Agence Cooperative d'Information?  
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There are, in Poland, two kinds of military working units: labor battalions and disciplinary battalions. Service in the former counts as compulsory military service, while in the latter the service is in addition to the normal military service. In the infantry, for example, the length of service is 2 years "in principle" but may, in fact, be extended arbitrarily by the government to 3 years. Furthermore, if a soldier commits an infraction of regulations, he may be punished by having to serve 2 additional years in the disciplinary battalions, making a total of 5 years.

Recruitment of labor battalions is from the groups with "poor social origins" such as sons of former officials and officers of the old regime, former merchants and industrialists, well-to-do peasants, former members of banned political parties, such as Peasant, Social Democrat, etc. Disciplinary battalions, on the other hand, are composed only of soldiers who have committed offenses.

The ranks of the disciplinary battalions are constantly increasing because of the punishments imposed for the least infraction of the army's iron discipline. In 1951, the personnel in disciplinary battalions did not exceed 2.3 percent of the total number in the army. In 1953, it had reached a total of 40,000, or 15 percent of army strength.

The establishment of these two types of battalions has a double purpose: to furnish cheap manpower for the government wherever it may be needed and to inculcate the young men with the spirit of the [Communist] regime. The second objective will, obviously, not be successful, since the men who have been obliged to serve will have nothing but hate for their taskmasters.

Living conditions in the battalions are extremely bad. No hygienic rules are observed. Although there is an 8-hour workday, it is observed as follows: 8 hours of work; 8 hours of instruction; and 8 hours of rest, which are reduced by ideological training and various supplementary tasks.

The battalions are composed of the worst elements of the army, among which are a number who have received special instruction from the Bezpieka (Security Police). Correspondence, receipt of food packages, and family visits are severely restricted. Members of the disciplinary battalion are given free time one Sunday afternoon every 3 months.

Under such conditions the mortality rate is very high. The statistics are disguised, however, through a system of transferring very sick personnel to their original units, thereby showing the subsequent deaths in the statistics of the original units.

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